

**M**ARCH is the time when Sir James Turner, the powerful president of the National Farmers' Union, has to fight on two fronts. In the early days of the month Sir James and his cohort of statistical experts sit in the Ministry of Agriculture thrashing out the annual review of farm



SIR JAMES TURNER

prices. As Easter approaches he prepares to go forth and answer those critical members who claim that he should have done more to uphold their income.

Sir James is not an easy man to grind between two millstones. Before the war, when he farmed 320 acres near Sheffield, he was a county rugby player of high repute; and he still enters committee meetings with the air of a man leading a charging pack. His massive physique is an excellent advertisement for British food-stuffs; his jutting jaw shields one of the most persuasive tongues exercised in Whitehall.

He has now held his office for eleven years; and the fact that there are no other visible claimants for the role of "Big Brother of British Farming" is evidence of his success.

#### Egg Battle

Outside the agricultural community Sir James has more vocal critics. At a public inquiry in Church House, Westminster, last week I heard some of them protesting against the egg marketing scheme hatched by the National Farmers' Union.

The atmosphere then was decorous, even somnolent, while the argument touched theoretical heights "Do you believe that there is such a thing as the law of supply and demand?" Before the inquiry is finished, however, some hard blows can be expected; and Sir James will need all his eloquence to protect his scheme from the housewives' wrath.

#### Boss of Bahrain

IT is ironic that the thirtieth anniversary of Sir Charles Belgrave's arrival in Bahrain should be marked by an outbreak of rioting and murder. Since he became adviser to the ruling sheikh in 1926, this dynamic Englishman has built

up a startlingly efficient administration.

Then all was poverty and chaos. Now there are fine schools—Lady Belgrave is director of female education—2,000 cars for a population of 120,000, and a Government service that many observers believe to be the best on the Persian Gulf.

#### Pearls of the Gulf

Sir Charles is an unmistakable figure. He stands six foot four inches, and his bull neck is often swathed by a bright pink tie—he has a huge collection of unspeakable neckwear. His shirts are equally flamboyant; and in Bahrain's sunlight he is said to be "clearly visible at half a mile."

He is also a literary craftsman of some merit, but I note with regret that he failed to win a prize in the slogan contest that was organised to publicise Bahrain's pearl industry. The judge chose "Pearls, Progress and Prosperity." Sir Charles's favourite entry was "Drape your girls with Bahrain pearls."

#### Out of Retirement

**MR. RAYMOND CHANDLER'S** contribution to today's book pages is, I understand, the first piece of writing that he has published since his return to this country a year or so ago.

It is very nearly, in fact, his first book-review, although he admits to having contributed to "The Academy" shortly after the editorship (1907-10) of Lord Alfred Douglas. Chandler fans who hunt down his essays in this long-defunct periodical will not, however, have the master's blessing. "Vrry, vrry, vrry high-flown," is his recollection of them. "precious. Young man's stuff, I guess. Better forgotten, anyway."

Mr. Chandler regards reviewers in general with Christian moderation (both his parents were Quakers). "I can't say they affect me at all," he says. But perhaps they, as much as we, look forward to Mr. Chandler's new thriller, which is set in a small town near San Diego and is, he says, "about half finished."

#### Marshall Money

**FOR** the last few years London has been in high favour with American politicians. In one hectic period of four months last year no fewer than twenty-nine Senators and seventy-nine Congressmen visited this country.

When Marshall Aid was introduced in 1948 Great Britain agreed to pay the American Government 10 per cent. of the value of the aid

received in unconvertible sterling. These "counterpart" funds were to be used in this country at the discretion of the American Government. For the last eight years visiting Senators and Congressmen, on their various missions, could call at the American Embassy and say "I need £100"—or £1,000. The counterpart money would be handed to them without question; and, as the recipients had only to account for their spend-

ing to their colleagues, tolerance was the order of the day. Now I am told that there is only £3,000 left in the counterpart account. From now on our Congressional visitors will get a paltry allowance of £3 a day. They could hardly be blamed for preferring Paris—where a counterpart account still bulges.

#### Overture and Beginners

**H**EARING that "The Stage" will this month celebrate its seventy-fifth birthday I

went down to Covent Garden and picked my way through the cabbage stalks to the Dickensian office in which Mr. Kenneth Comerford, the twenty-eight-year-old grandson of one of the paper's two founders, presides over its fortunes.

"The Stage" today keeps fairly closely to its main interests; but in Vol. 1, Irving's *Iago* was reviewed side by side with a "Barmaid Contest" at North Woolwich Gardens." The

file for 1881 also records that, at an amateur performance of "Romeo and Juliet," "Mr. Oscar Wyldie (sic) testified from the stalls unbounded delight at the pranks of the ultra-aesthetic Romeo."

#### Exchange and Mart

At a time when every issue of "The Stage" carried detailed notices of more than sixty or seventy provincial productions, the agony column was charged

with interest for those who share my sombre passion for this form of reading.

"Hand-painted fan, said to be of great value: would exchange for underclothing, small figure." was an item that distracted me from the conscientious review of Dugès Cleopatra and the eulogy of "Lurline, Queen of the Waters," whose speciality it was to cut and eat an orange while totally submerged.

#### Chaplin Blues

**AS** is their custom, Sir Alan and Lady Herbert entertained a distinguished company to see the Boat Race from their home on the river at Hammersmith yesterday.

There is an upper room—a kind of holy of holies—from which the view is more extensive but which, owing to an uncertain floor, can safely accommodate no more than ten people. Yesterday N.A.T.O., politics, diplomacy, the stage, the film, and art were well represented. Viscount Montgomery, Mr. and Mrs. Gwilym Lloyd-George, Sir John and Lady Balfour, Miss Anna Neagle, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Chaplin, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Fairbanks, and Sir Gerald and Lady Kelly together followed the exciting race. The floor survived.

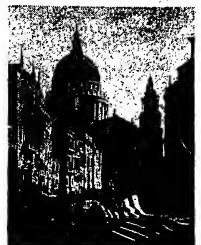
Mr. Chaplin, always champion of the underdog, backed Oxford. He lost a shilling to Lord Montgomery.

#### Veneziana

**DISCUSSIONS** of Sir William Holford's plan for the area round St. Paul's have been haunted by the memory of one of the world's most famous townscapes—the surroundings of St. Mark's in Venice.

On television last Monday, and in an earlier discussion at the Architectural Association, Sir William dealt with the idea of a liberated St. Paul's: a

device by which the great building, like St. Mark's, could be surveyed freely and on foot. In this he was on his own favourite ground; for although he spends his time between Regent's Park and the windy amphitheatre of Hastings, he has, for years been studying the detail of Venetian life,



ST. PAUL'S AFLOAT

and few Englishmen have so close a knowledge of the delectable city.

One Englishman, however, was there before him with the dream of a Venetian St. Paul's. This was William Marlow who in the 1790s, painted the picture which I reproduce here. The architectural capriccio is familiar to all lovers of Venetian art; but Marlow's particular mingling is unique. It was bought for the Tate Gallery in 1954.

#### "Morne Plaine"

**IN** Paris last week a friend of mine had occasion to take a train from that rarity among terminals, the Gare d'Austerlitz.

"Quick as you can," he said to his driver. "I'm late."

But the train left at 11.47, and it was 11.48 when the taxi pulled into the station.

The driver pulled a face. "Alas, Monsieur," he said. "It is not Austerlitz. It is Waterloo."